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Source: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 12/13, Proceedings of the International Congress Commemorating the Millennium of Christianity in Rus'-Ukraine (1988/1989), pp. 360-372
Published by: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036320
Accessed: 06/04/2013 23:16

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The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography

CYRIL MANGO

We would probably not be celebrating the millennium of the conversion of Rus' if the Rus' chroniclers had not adopted a system of dating and a tradition of chronography from Byzantium along with the new faith. The Rus' chronicle—for there is no such thing as a medieval Rus' "history" in the technical sense of the term—was plugged into the Byzantine network and thereby replicated an entire vision of the human past. That is a matter of general knowledge, and an ocean of ink has been spilt on the thorny problems of the reception of Byzantine chronicles in the Slavic world, their translation, influence, and continuation. I shall not reopen that old debate, which others are much better qualified to do than I am. My intention is to examine instead the tradition of Byzantine chronography, which, I believe, was undergoing some interesting transformations in the ninth and tenth centuries, i.e., in the period of the conversion of the Slavs.

We tend to regard Byzantine chronography as a continuum, running from Eusebius of Caesarea (and even earlier) to the sixteenth century. That is not a mistaken view, but it is a view taken from a considerable distance; for if we take a closer look we discover many gaps and changes of direction within a broadly uniform framework. The biggest gap for us corresponds to the "Dark Age" of Byzantium, i.e, the second half of the seventh and the greater part of the eighth century. The Paschal Chronicle stops in 628 in the form in which we have it; the combined chronicles of Syncellus and Theophanes date from ca. 811–814. Even after Theophanes the continuum is very slack: George the Monk, who brings the story down to 843, was, according to the latest research,[1] writing after 871, and we have to wait until the middle of the tenth century to find a connected account of events from 813 onward, i.e., from the point where Theophanes breaks off.

I shall return to the big gap in a moment. But first I must confess my ignorance on a matter of considerable importance, for I do not know the mechanism whereby events were recorded in the Byzantine world. Ideally speaking, a chronicle ought to be compiled year by year or, at any rate, at regular and frequent intervals. We know that in the medieval West, annals

[1] A. Markopoulos, Συμβολὴ στὴ χρονολόγηση τοῦ Γεωργίου Μοναχοῦ, Κέντρον Βυζ. Ἐρευνῶν, Σύμμεικτα 6 (1985): 223–31.

were appended from time to time to paschal tables,[2] but to my knowledge no such Byzantine annals have survived. Their existence (which remains to be proved) has been, however, postulated by Romilly Jenkins as underlying the portion of the Chronicle of Symeon the Logothete for the years 867–913.[3] Clearly, many stories we read in Byzantine chronicles were ultimately due to eyewitnesses. Take that of the murder of Michael III in September 867, told by the same Logothete. Only a person who was present on that fateful evening and who had accompanied the murderers as they made their way in the dark from the palace of St. Mamas, across the Golden Horn, as they stopped at a particular house, climbed the city walls and finally entered the Imperial Palace could have described these events in such minute and vivid detail.[4] Yet the Logothete was writing roughly a century later. However many intermediary stages we postulate, we have in the end to reach the person who, in 867 or the following year, first wrote the story down. And so I come back to the question: was there some provision for recording events as they occurred and, if so, in what milieu?

For the early Byzantine period the existence of city chronicles, kept in major urban centres, like Antioch and Constantinople, has been supposed:[5] these are said to be reflected in the Chronicles of Malalas and Marcellinus Comes, among others. In fact, we possess two local chronicles of that period, focused on Edessa in Mesopotamia. The earlier of the two, known by the name of Joshua the Stylite, covers the years 494 to 506. It was not, however, produced under the auspices of the municipal authorities. As the preface makes clear, it was commissioned by the abbot of a monastery from an author whom the said abbot had met only once; and it was specifically intended as an admonition to virtue for future monks of the same establishment.[6] In other words, it was an entirely ad hoc production motivated by moral considerations, not a concern for preserving an accurate record of the past. The other Edessa chronicle, known as *Chronicon Edessenum*, is a collection of meager notices, such as obituaries and appointments of local bishops and the construction of buildings from 313 to 533. The records appear to have been kept in the cathedral of Edessa, and were occasionally

[2] See, e.g., R. L. Poole, *Chronicles and Annals* (Oxford, 1926).

[3] "The Chronological Accuracy of the 'Logothete' for the Years A. D. 867–913," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (hereafter *DOP*), 19 (1965): 91–112. Even if the relevant entries proved to be in correct chronological order, that does not necessarily demonstrate their reliance on annals.

[4] *Leo grammaticus*, Bonn ed., 251ff. = *Georgius monachus* (cont.), Bonn ed., 836ff.

[5] A. Freund, *Beiträge zur antiochenischen und zur konstantinopolitanischen Stadtchronik* (Jena, 1882). B. Croke, "The Chronicle of Marcellinus and its Contemporary and Historiographical Context," Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1978.

[6] *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, ed. and trans. W. Wright (Cambridge, 1882), p. 1 ff.

supplemented from other written sources, one of them Antiochene.[7] Many short local chronicles, the so-called *Kleinchroniken*, are also known from the end of the Middle Ages,[8] and they, too, appear to have been composed in a fortuitous fashion. As to the so-called Chronicle of Monemvasia, which may be of the ninth century, it cannot be described as a chronicle in any meaningful sense.[9]

As we enter the Middle Ages proper we naturally think of monasteries as the milieu where annals and chronicles would normally have been written. That is also what Pushkin assumed:

В часы
Свободные от подвигов духовных
Описывай, не мудрствуя лукаво,
Всё то, чему свидетель в жизни будешь
Войну и мир, управу государей,
Угодников святые чудеса,
Пророчества и знаменья небесны.

Pushkin was not mistaken: in Rus' as in the medieval West, as also in the Syriac orbit, chronicles were composed in monasteries. Oddly enough, however, in Byzantium we do not find a single monastic chronicle. Let me explain: we do, of course, have a few chronicles that were compiled by monks, like Theophanes or George surnamed Hamartolos, and some may think that in so doing they manifested a monastic spirit, whatever that may be. What we do not find is a chronicle that records, be it occasionally, events that were of interest to a particular monastic community; I mean entries like "Sturmi abbas Fuldensis coenobii moritur; cui successit Baugolf eiusdem monasterii monachus" or "Hoc anno basilica sancti Bonifacii martyris in coenonio Fuldense. . . dedicata est."[10] The absence of all such notices from the Byzantine tradition suggests to me that the writing of annals or chronicles was not maintained on a regular basis in any Byzantine monastery.

What, then, are the alternatives? For some periods if not for others the possible existence of court annals needs to be considered. On the other hand, it may be argued that the big chronographic compendia that have come down to us, far from offering primary material—except in a few cases, like the final portion of Theophanes—are merely a digest at second

[7] See L. Hallier, *Untersuchungen über die Edessenische Chronik, Texte und Untersuchungen* 9/1 (1892).

[8] Ed. P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, I (Vienna, 1975).

[9] See P. Lemerle, "La Chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie," *Revue des études byzantines* (hereafter *REB*), 21 (1963): 5–49.

[10] *Annales Fuldenses*, a. 779, 819.

or third remove of a medley of available sources, many of them being of a non-chronicle nature. The latter conclusion gains some support from the well-known preface of Skylitzes.[11] His aim, we may remember, was to compose a "synopsis" or "epitome" in the manner of Theophanes from A.D. 811 to his own time. He proceeds to name his authorities; after rejecting, as being useless, two overly succinct compilations, one of them by Michael Psellus, he lists ten authors, most of them, alas, lost to us. In his words, they had written laudations or invectives dealing at length with the events of their own days or a little earlier, and had done so with bias, to curry favor or even under order. None of the ten appears to have been a proper chronicle. That was the material Skylitzes had at his disposal and, after pruning it down to his own satisfaction, he supplemented it only with certain oral traditions communicated to him by old men. Skylitzes was a high imperial official. Had there existed a court chronicle, he might have spared himself a good deal of trouble.

I have raised the above questions not only because they are important in themselves (whatever the correct answer may be), but also because they have a bearing on Rus' chronography. The Primary Chronicle, as we all know, does have an annalistic form, which—or so it has been argued—goes back to the second stage of the chronicle's composition, the one conjecturally associated with the monk Nikon in the 1060s.[12] If it was indeed Nikon who adopted this format and instituted in the Monastery of the Caves a tradition of recording events year by year, he may have had certain models in mind. At first sight these do not appear to have been Greek models.

I come back to what I have called the great gap. For us, as I have said, it is delimited on either side by a work of chronography, namely, the Paschal Chronicle on the one hand and Syncellus plus Theophanes on the other. Of these only Syncellus was translated into Slavic in a shortened form. Significantly, both the Paschal Chronicle and Theophanes are based on an annalistic principle, but that is as far as their mutual resemblance extends. The Paschal Chronicle, which, incidentally, does not appear to have enjoyed a wide diffusion and is preserved in only one manuscript, is a very strange work.[13] Its avowed purpose is to present a method, based on

[11] Ed. Thurn, 3–4. On this passage see J. Darrouzès and L. G. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopatès: Correspondance* (Paris, 1978), pp. 6–10; A. Markopoulos, "Théodore Daphnopatès et la Continuation de Théophane," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 35 (1985): 171–82.

[12] D. S. Lixačev, *Russkie letopisi* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1947), pp. 77ff., following A. A. Šaxmatov.

[13] See J. Beauchamp, R. C. Bondoux et al. in *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age*, Colloques internationaux du C.N.R.S., no. 604 (Paris, 1984), pp. 451–68.

astronomical cycles, for determining the date of Easter and validating that of certain other liturgical feasts—Christmas, the Annunciation, the Presentation in the Temple, the birthday of John the Baptist. To do so the author had to establish certain key dates—that of the creation of the world or rather that of the luminaries, which marked the beginning of time, of the Crucifixion, etc. He could have accomplished his purpose by composing a treatise on computation coupled with a discussion of biblical chronology. The historical or narrative element—I am thinking especially of Roman history after the apostolic age—is extraneous to his aim, and it is not clear to me why he included it at all and did so in a particular form, which necessitated the recording of each successive indiction, regnal year, and consulship within a grid of Olympiads. The number of "empty" years is proportionally very high and the presence or absence of historical matter appears at first sight capricious, although further research may uncover some underlying pattern.

We have, as I have said, no extant Greek chronicle composed between ca. 630 and ca. 810, but that does not mean that none existed. We can be fairly confident that there was a chronicle, written at Constantinople, down to 641;[14] the reign of Constans II (641–68) was not recorded at all; but from 668 down to 769, at the earliest, an account of events was kept: it is the common source of Nicephorus and Theophanes. Since we do not possess it in its original form, it is hazardous to say how it was structured, although there is some reason to believe that its entries were dated by indiction.[15] There are also a number of ghosts conjured up by modern scholarship.[16] The so-called *Megas Chronographos*, whose title will remind slavicists of the hypothetical *Letopisec po velikomu izloženiju*, is represented by eighteen fragments appended to the unique manuscript of the Paschal Chronicle. In my opinion it ought to be removed from the eighth century and placed no earlier than the middle of the ninth.[17] Traianos Patrikios, allegedly a contemporary of the Emperor Justinian II, is no more than a name,[18] and I see no benefit in associating him with the conjectural

[14] Being the source of Nicephorus's *Breviarium* for that period. See my "The *Breviarium* of the Patriarch Nicephorus," *Byzance: Hommage à A. Stratos* (Athens, 1986), 2: 543.

[15] As appears from the imperfectly reworked paraphrase of Nicephorus, ed. C. de Boor, *Nicephori opuscula historica* (Leipzig, 1880), pp. 70, 75–77.

[16] Cf. A. Markopoulos, "A la recherche des textes perdus," *From Late Antiquity to Early Byzantium*, ed. V. Vavřínek (Prague, 1985), pp. 203–207.

[17] As I have tried to show in the article cited in fn. 14.

[18] C. de Boor, "Der Historiker Traianus," *Hermes* 17 (1882): 489–92.

Epitome.[19] In other words, while the "big gap" is partly the result of the accidents of preservation, it is still true to say that neither historiography nor chronography flourished during the Dark Age.

The Byzantine revival that started shortly before the year 800 and corresponds to the Carolingian Renascence in the West was certainly marked by a renewed interest in history. Oddly, it has not left us any text resembling Einhard's *Vita Karoli*—say, a Life of the Empress Irene in classical Greek.[20] It has left us the following works, which I am placing in approximate chronological order: (1) The Short History or *Breviarium* of Patriarch Nicephorus; (2) a proliferation of succinct chronologies rather than chronicles; (3) the bulky Chronicle of Syncellus completed by Theophanes; (4) possibly parts of the History by Sergius Confessor.

The first of these does not concern us here: it is (or pretends to be) a history, not a chronicle, although, in fact, it is no more than a paraphrase into ancient Greek of earlier chronicle sources already mentioned. Nor do we have to consider the fourth: Sergius Confessor, whom I have tried to identify with the father of the patriarch Photius,[21] is known to have written a historical work extending to the year 828.[22] It is not specifically described as a chronicle and is said to have contained an extensive account casting back to the reign of Constantine V. It is conceivable, as suggested by Warren Treadgold, that two preserved texts, the so-called *Scriptor incertus de Leone* and the "Dujčev fragment" about the Bulgarian disaster of 811, are derived from the History of Sergius.

I pass to item 2, namely, the succinct chronologies. Of these we have several Slavonic versions, namely: (1) The *Letopisec vskore* attributed to Patriarch Nicephorus. Found in several recensions, it extends from Adam to the murder of Michael III on 23 September 867, followed by Rusian material;[23] (2) The *Istorikii za Boga vkratce*, dated 893/94 (indiction 12) and ascribed to Constantine of Preslav. As it stands, it is a list from Adam to the emperor Leo VI, but the last two entries, those for Basil I and Leo VI, given in rounded figures, appear to have been added.[24] If I am not mistaken,

[19] On which see, especially, D. Serruys, "Recherches sur l'Epitomè," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 16 (1907): 1–51.

[20] Cf. P. J. Alexander, "Secular Biography at Byzantium," *Speculum* 15 (1940): 194–209.

[21] "The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios," in *Byzantium and its Image* (London, 1984), study 13.

[22] Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 67.

[23] Ed. N. V. Stepanov, *Izvestija Otdelenija russkogo jazyka i slovesnosti* 17/2 (1912): 250–93; 17/3 (1912): 256–320.

[24] Ed. V. N. Zlatarski, *Spisanie na Bălgarskata Akademija na Naukite* 27 (1923): 132–82. Cf. B. S. Angelov, *Byzantinobulgarica* 2 (1966): 83–105.

the Greek original extended to 867 or, possibly, to 866;[25] (3) The list of emperors from Augustus to Constantine VII and Zoe placed at the end of Svjatoslav's *Izbornik* of 1073. This is usually regarded as of Bulgarian origin, i.e., as forming part of King Symeon's collection, although it occurs after the colophon.[26]

It is admitted that these compendia exerted an important influence on the elaboration of chronology in Rus' and their mutual relationship has been the subject of considerable discussion. The whole question needs, however, to be reexamined in the light of the Greek material, which presents a much more complicated picture than has been supposed. What we have before us is not merely the *Chronographikon syntomon* of the patriarch Nicephorus as edited by de Boor.[27] Not only did de Boor fail to use many manuscripts, including the four oldest;[28] there also circulated soon after the year 800 several versions of the same work or, perhaps, several works of the same nature. One was used by Syncellus not later than 811; the same or another by Theophanes; a third is found in Cod. *Vatic. gr. 2210* of the tenth century.[29] I am unable to say when this work originated or what form it had at the beginning. What is worth pointing out, however, is that it exhibits a wide range of historical interest, for in its fullest form it consists of the following sections:

1. An Old Testament chronology from Adam to the Babylonian captivity.
2. The kings of Persia from Cyrus to Alexander's conquest.
3. The Ptolemies down to Cleopatra.
4. The emperors of Rome from Julius Caesar down to Michael II (820–29).
5. Roman empresses starting with the wives of Constantius Chlorus, the father of Constantine I.
6. The kings of the ten tribes of Israel in Samaria.

[25] It ends with: Theodora and Michael [III]—14 years, 1 month, 2 [for 22] days; Michael alone—11 years, 1 month, 9 days [as in the Greek: ed. de Boor, *Nicephori opusc. hist.*, 101, col. 2]; Basil [I]—20 years; Leo [VI]—7 years, i.e., to the time of writing. The joint reign of Michael III and Basil I (26 May 866–23 Sept. 867) is not mentioned. If the figure for Michael given in the *Istorikii* (11 years, 1 month, 9 days) is meant to cover both his sole rule and his joint rule with Basil, it should, in fact, have been 11 years, 6 months, 8 days (15 March 856–23 Sept. 867); if his sole rule only, 10 years, 2 months, 9 days.

[26] Ed. E. K. Piotrovskaja in *Izbornik Svjatoslava 1073 g.* (Moscow, 1977), pp. 317–31.

[27] *Nicephori opusc. hist.*, pp. 80–135.

[28] British Library, *Add. 19390* (late 9th century); Oxford, Christ Church, *Wake 5* (late 9th century); *olim* Dresden, *Da 12*, now in Moscow (A.D. 932); Jerusalem, Greek Patriarchate, *cod. 24* (tenth century).

[29] Ed. A. Schoene, *Eusebii Chron. liber prior*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1875), app. IV, pp. 81–83.

7. The high priests of the Jews from Aaron to the sack of Jerusalem by the Romans.
8. The bishops of Constantinople from Metrophanes[30] perhaps down to the iconoclast Theodotus (815–21).
9. The popes of Rome.
10. The bishops of Jerusalem.
11. The bishops of Alexandria.
12. The bishops of Antioch.
13. A list of the canonical, dubious, and apocryphal books of the Bible with the number of verses in each.

To these Cod. *Vatic. gr. 2210* also adds a list of the Sassanian kings of Persia and one of the Arab caliphs. The historical perspective indicated by these chronologies corresponds exactly to that of Syncellus and Theophanes, to whom I now turn. The Slavs had to make do with the first four items only.[31]

The Chronicle of Theophanes is so familiar to students of the early Middle Ages, enjoyed such a wide diffusion, and exerted so much influence on later compilations both in Greek and Latin that we tend to regard it as the typical Byzantine chronicle. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a highly unusual work that reflects the preoccupations of a particular milieu at a particular time. A definition of its scope is given in the prefatory remarks of Syncellus,[32] who had the intention of completing the work himself down to A.D. 808; in the event he was forced to stop in A.D. 284 and the remaining part—actually to A.D. 813—was edited by Theophanes. Now Syncellus, too, was preoccupied with computation. He was intent on establishing that the world had been created on the 25th of March, 5500 years before the birth of Christ, and that the Resurrection took place on the 25th of March of the year 5534. That is the so-called Alexandrian computation, which differs both from that of the Paschal Chronicle (creation of the luminaries on 21 March 5507 B.C.) and from the common Byzantine system, which was already fairly well entrenched at Constantinople in the ninth century and reckoned from 5508 B.C. In addition to setting up a correct chronological framework, Syncellus, as distinct from the author of the Paschal Chronicle, is also interested in the narrative element: he wishes to record in proper sequence all the important events of world history "as regards nations and empires," as he puts it. These events are to be taken from Holy Scripture

[30] The earliest versions omit the mythical bishops of Byzantium, starting with the apostle Andrew (ed. de Boor, 112–14.)

[31] Or fewer. The Izbornik of 1073 has only the list of emperors starting with Augustus.

[32] Bonn ed., 4, 10 = ed. A. A. Mosshammer (Leipzig, 1984), pp. 2, 5–6.

as well as from the more notable historians, and have to do with kings, priests, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and teachers as well as the famous men of heathen nations, to wit, philosophers, practitioners of other arts, generals, and exemplars of unusual depravity. Finally, Syncellus emphasizes his concern with the Mohammedan apostasy, the same that had been prophesied by the apostle Paul for the end of days (2 Thess. 2.3).

In his own preface[33] Theophanes gives a brief review of the unfinished work of Syncellus:

> He made a very exact study of the dates, reconciled their divergences, corrected them and set them together in a manner surpassing all his predecessors. He recorded the lives and dates of the ancient kings of every nation and, as far as he was able, accurately inserted the bishops of the great ecumenical sees, I mean those of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, both those who had tended the Church in the right faith and those who, like robbers, had ruled in heresy.

As for his own part, Theophanes defines it as follows:

> I did not set down anything of my own composition, but have made a selection from the ancient historians and prose-writers and have consigned to their proper places the events of every year, arranged without confusion. In this manner the readers may be able to know in which year of each emperor what event took place, be it military or ecclesiastical or civic or popular or of any other kind; for I believe that one who reads the actions of the ancients derives no small benefit from doing so.

Thus the stage is set: the chronicle is to be several things at once, namely, a narrative (seeing that history is beneficial), but a narrative broken down chronologically within a general scheme that reflects the symmetry of God's purpose.

In terms of geographical coverage it is, of course, something of an exaggeration to describe the Chronicle of Theophanes as being universal. Yet it is much more than an account of the Byzantine Empire. While very little is said about the West, the rise of Islam (as announced by Syncellus) and the affairs of Eastern Christians after the Arab conquest are given great prominence. That in itself reflects a certain view of the the world. What I should like to emphasize, however, is not so much the content as the structure. Each annual entry is preceded by a rubric written horizontally across the page. It consists of the *annus mundi*, occasionally the *annus Domini*, the regnal year of the Roman emperor, of the king of Persia, and of the five patriarchs, those of Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, in that order. When the Sassanian kings of Persia cease, their place is taken by the Arab caliphs. The succession of the two great temporal rulers and of the five leaders of the Christian church establish the universal

[33] Ed. de Boor, pp. 3–4.

framework. At the same time the rubrics put to use the succint chronologies we have already discussed, with the difference that they are now synchronized.

The question now arises of the origin of this particular structure. Broadly speaking, it goes back to the Chronicle of Eusebius, which was arranged in vertical columns of rulers intersected by a horizontal grid of dates, namely, Olympiads and years from Abraham. Within this layout room was left for a *spatium historicum*, but it was necessarily very succinct, consisting of entries such as "X flourished at this time," there being no space on the page for a fuller narrative.[34] Indeed, one finds in the earlier part of Theophanes many traces of Eusebian-like entries, e.g., "At that time, too, Dorotheus, bishop of Tyre, who had suffered greatly under Diocletian. . . was in his prime;"[35] or "In this year Eustathius, presbyter of Constantinople, a man of apostolic life. . . was conspicuous as well as the architect Zenobius, who had built the Martyrium at Jerusalem at Constantine's behest."[36] Let us grant, therefore, that the ultimate source of Theophanes's scheme was the Chronicle of Eusebius, which was, indeed, known to Syncellus. We may ask next whether the Eusebian tradition was kept alive in Greek between the fourth and the early ninth century. If I am not mistaken, its last Greek representative was Panodorus, who was active in the fifth century and used the very same system of Alexandrian computation from 5508 B.C. that we find in Syncellus and Theophanes. Subsequently, the Greek text of the Eusebian Chronicle was itself lost: what we know of it today derives from the Latin adaptation made by Jerome, the incomplete Armenian version, and bits of a Syriac synopsis, the last two made towards the end of the sixth century. Setting aside Syncellus, who, I believe was a Palestinian, there is no trace of Eusebius's Chronicle at Constantinople in the ninth century, nor, indeed, that of Panodorus. In Syriac, however, the Eusebian tradition did live on and is represented by Jacob of Edessa, who was active at the very end of the seventh century.

Briefly, I would suggest that the concept of Theophanes's Chronicle owes more to the Syriac than to the Greek tradition. However that may be, it represents a dead end in the Byzantine domain. Its content continued to be plagiarized, but its structure was never again imitated. What happened after Theophanes may be described as a split. The short chronologies or *Letopiscy vskore* lived on independently and were constantly brought up to

[34] See A. A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg, 1979), pp. 67ff.

[35] Ed. de Boor, p. 24.

[36] Ed. de Boor, p. 33.

date as regards the Byzantine emperors, empresses, and patriarchs of Constantinople, the other lists being either omitted or left in a fossilized state. Their underlying chronology, based on the obsolete Alexandrian computation, was not rectified, a circumstance that caused considerable complication in the Slavic world. The narrative chronicle, on the other hand, shed its chronological skeleton while at the same time undergoing a shrinkage of its horizons: it became little more than a story of the Byzantine emperors.

The next author we have to consider is George the Monk, about whom practically nothing is known. He, too, stands alone, but in a different sense. It is worth reading his preface, notable for its obscurantism, its vitriolic character, and its bad Greek. George begins by firing a broadside at all those secular authors, historians, poets, and "chronographers" who have written in a lofty and verbose manner about ancient kings, philosophers, and orators. He does not tell us whom he has in mind, but assures us that their writings are incomprehensible to the ordinary reader. Which is why George, uncultivated as he was and ignorant of secular science and fine style, yet a man who had read many histories, even pagan ones, and many edifying treatises, composed this little book, compressing many matters into a brief compass. It contains nothing but unadorned truth. Indeed, men of the spirit, who are expert at quarrying holy doctrines, do not have recourse to complicated and artful speech, which is usually an excuse for mendacity, but are concerned only with truth even if it is expressed in a barbarous tongue.

Having thus made his position clear, George proceeds to entice the reader by giving him some highlights of the little book: the invention and overturning of idols; the absurd myths invented by pagan philosophers and the godless doctrines of different nations; the beginning of monastic life, rooted in the Old Dispensation, but elevated by the example of Christ's life; the abominable, profane, and rabid madness of the Manichees which spawned the horrible heresy of the Iconoclasts; the ludicrous religion of the Saracens and the beastly life of their false prophet; finally, the infantile rebellion of the old man Thomas and his destruction.[37] I leave aside the question of why George, if he was writing as late as ca. 870, was so concerned with the revolt of Thomas the Slav in the 820s.

The uniqueness of George's work and the key to his popularity lie in the fact that he is not at all interested in history. Events for him are simply an excuse for moral and theological lessons expressed through lengthy quotations from the Fathers. Take as an example his treatment of Justinian's

[37] Ed. de Boor, 1: 1–3.

reign, which occupies twenty-seven pages in de Boor's edition.[38] Of the twenty-seven only six, i.e., less than a quarter, are devoted to what may be called events, and these have been carefully selected: Justinian's wars, his reconquest of the West, even his code of law have all been edited out. Prodigies and the plague occupy roughly three pages. The remaining three deal with the rebuilding of St. Sophia, the introduction of certain liturgical innovations, a brief mention of the Nika riot, a confusion over the date of Easter, and the persecution of pederasts. By contrast, eleven pages are taken up by extracts concerning the Fifth Ecumenical Council, nine by quotations from John Chrysostom and Anastasius Sinaita about the evils of pederasty, Sodom and Gomorrah, and one with a further quotation from pseudo-Chrysostom about the dominical feasts. It is easy to make fun of George the Monk; it is harder to forgive him for having told us practically nothing about events in his own lifetime. His real importance lies, however, in the history of ideology.

To George's Chronicle, if it can be so called, was tacked on part of that of Symeon the Logothete down to the year 948 without any consideration of their mutual incongruity. Symeon's work, of which I shall say little,[39] may perhaps be viewed as a typical Byzantine chronicle of the Middle period. It contains a small measure of moralizing, but no theological commentary. It gives some dates by month and indiction, occasionally the day of the week, but not the *annus mundi*. It shows some political or, more accurately, factional bias and a strong preoccupation with the leading families. Its interest in prodigies is limited. The gaps in its coverage, e.g., for the decade 930–940, are difficult to explain. But most important is the shrinkage of its horizons, which hardly extend beyond Constantinople and the affairs of the court.

Of later developments I shall mention only one, which falls largely within the twelfth century. It is an attempt not so much to popularize the chronicle story as to make it attractive for the consumption of a new class of literate aristocrats. The versed Chronicle of Manasses, intended for oral recitation, is the best representative of this trend, and it proved a great success in both Greek and Slavic.

[38] Ed. de Boor, 2: 627–54.

[39] Among many studies devoted to it, see especially G. Ostrogorskij, "Slavjanskij perevod Xroniki Simeona Logofeta," *Seminarium Kondakovianum* 5 (1932): 17–37; A. P. Každan, "Xronika Simeona Logofeta," *Vizantijskij vremennik* 15 (1959): 125–43; A. Markopoulos, Ἡ Χρονογραφία τοῦ Ψευδοσυμεών, Diss. Ioannina, 1978, p. 1ff.

I hope I have fulfilled, however sketchily, my promise of describing some of the main developments in the tradition of Byzantine chronography. In the story as I have told it, the ninth century represents the pivotal period, which witnessed the transition from a universal to a local perspective. If I were asked to explain that development, I would point in the first instance to the breaking away of the Greek-speaking Christian communities of Palestine and Syria, with which Syncellus and Theophanes could still identify themselves. By the time of the Byzantine reconquest of parts of Syria in the late tenth century the Orthodox Christian communities in those parts had become arabized and were no longer "part of us." Their fortunes were of little interest to the Constantinopolitan public. Even so, the overall framework of chronography was maintained: that of a single process flowing down from Adam to the present day. Gradually the inessential branches were cut down, the more so as it was no longer necessary to recalculate the dates of the Creation, the Incarnation, and of the major feasts by confronting the chronology of the Bible with that of the kings of Rome or Sicyon. That had all been done. Of the pagan prehistory there remained only some ghostly presences—Nimrod, Kronos, Sardanapalus, Perseus, the Pharaoh, Pelops, the Persian Cyrus, Romulus and Remus, Philip and Alexander of Macedon. George the Monk was able to despatch the lot of them in some thirty-five pages. That was, more or less, what the Slavs inherited from Byzantium. Their debt in no way accounts for the *Pověst' vremennyx lět*, either in organization or in literary quality. The Bulgarians, who never developed a native chronography, remained firmly within the Byzantine tradition.

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